

February 3, 1977

BW

Dr. James M. McCullough
The Library of Congress
Congressional Research Service
Washington, D.C. 20540

Dear Dr. McCullough,

Thank you for your note of January 18th about the current status of the BW convention. My question about Soviet acknowledgement of the treaty was not intended to bear on DNA recombination but rather whether they had made any statements about the dismantling of facilities or the destruction of stock-piles which is mandated to occur within 6 months of the treaty coming into force. I have not heard anything in that direction, and I guess I would be surprised if there were any public remark, but I wondered if something along that line had escaped me. As you know, there was considerable public statement in that direction from this country.

About recombinant DNA and the BW treaty, I still just do not understand what the fuss is about. There is no way that the treaty can encompass research with recombinant DNA. A separate and valid issue is some standardization of the safeguards that are appropriate to working with these agents, but this is presumably a matter for international information and national action. On the other hand, the use for hostile purposes of organisms derived from recombinant DNA research can hardly, by any stretch of the imagination, have been thought to be excluded from the convention. So, I just do not understand how to connect that trial balloon on "weapons of mass destruction" and DNA recombinant work. My own guess is that it is a smoke-screen. But if the Soviets have some ideas about draft treaties that would deal with research, that is certainly a new notion. Without any hope whatever of verification; and with very grave problems of definition, I wonder if that can get very far, but we shall see.

Anyhow, I look forward to seeing the report when it is ready from the printer and unless I hear from you further, will assume that we have exhausted the present subject. However, if there is anything new in this direction, I would certainly be grateful to hear from you about it.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr